Vol. II No. 5. **critical digest** November 14, 1949

The Weekly That Keeps You Informed Of The Current Broadway Critical Scene

N.Y. Openings This Week

The Father-Cort, 11/16/49. Revival of Strindberg classic was greeted with rave notices from Boston daily critics, while trade press praised the production, but doubted its chances on Broadway. Bill Riley, Billboard, even doubted if the actors knew what they were talking about in the 100 year old drama. Raymond Massey and Mady Christians received high personal praise from all the critics.

Closing N.Y. Shows This Week

Twelfth Night-Empire, 10/3/49-11/12/49. The first dramatic production of the season actually closes this week, after it had been given a two week reprieve.

Love Me Long-48th Street Theatre. 11/7/48-11/12/48.

Quick Glance at N.Y. New Shows -- digests on inside pages.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/2/49. The Lunts received a happy batch of anniversary greetings from the critics on the celebration of their 25th year in the theatre. But S.N.Behrman's play didn't come in for much of the celebration. Times, Compass, Time and New Yorker all considered the demerits of the script too much for even the Lunts to overcome.

Love Me Long-48th Street Theatre. 11/7/49. The twice postponed comedy lived up to the critics prediction. The show didn't last very long, for it closed after eight performances. Play, which starred Shirley Booth, found all of the critics in agreement for the first time this season. They all panned the play. Bolton, Morning Telegraph, admitted he laughed at some of the lines, but he still didn't think much of the play.

Magazine Reviewers Look At The New Plays -- digests on inside pages.

Montserrat-Fulton, 10/29/49. George Jean Nathan, Christian Science Monitor and Nation added their "No" votes to the majority of the critics who disliked the Hellman adaptation of the French play. Rubin, Daily Worker, praised the Hellman script, but didn't think it was up to the best she could do.

Lost In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Four determined "Con" reviews were registered against the Anderson-Weill musical version of the Paton novel by New Yorker, Nation, Christian Science Monitor and Daily Worker. Latter launched personal attack on all of Anderson's writings.

Regina-46th Street Theatre, 10/31/49. Controversy over "musical tragedy" continues to rage. Critics can't decide if it is play or opera, good or bad. Nation, Billboard and Journal of Commerce gave it "Con" reviews, the others voting for the theatrical experiment as an interesting play. The magazine critics, just like the daily critics, wondered why the producer bothered changing a good drama into a musical in the first place.

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance - Page 870 - Cumulative index issued monthly.

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I Know My Love

a. Times-Con: Play abuses the privilege of being light, nothing to say and very little to contribute to entertainment, untidy in construction, cluttered with cliches and nonentities, deficient in wit. Play recovers remarkably when Lunts on stage, they are the most accomplished actors in our theatre.-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune-Pro: An occasion for rejoicing. Eloquent dramatist has turned out a delectable play, they act it to the hilt. Production mounted munificently. Here is theatre at its most glamorous and engaging.-Barnes.

c. News-Pro: Delightful vehicle played with infectious zest and satisfaction. Play astute combination of sentiment and sophistication, one of Behrman's best comedies. Lunts are wonderful people to be with.-Chapman.

d. Mirror-Pro: Behrman at his best, dialogue that sparkles on surface and has bite of cobra beneath it. Play spells South Pacific sans music. Playgoing has again become a tremendously stimulating experience.-Coleman.

e. Compass-Con: Just another vehicle, but flatter than usual. Behrman must have left gobs of the original out of his adaptation. He used to write delightfully, here he sounds banal. Many will moan at the sight of the clever Lunts repeating themselves via gestures and mannerisms.-Pollock.

f. Post-Pro: Sprawling, uncertain play. But has great merit of providing Lunts with proper springboard for their incomparable talents. The theatre as theatre takes on magic again, a real theatrical comfort.-Watts.

g. Sun-Pro: Pretty flimsy play, but don't matter. The Lunts are playing love scenes again and Broadway seems a wonderful place once more. Supporting cast negligible, costumes wonderful. Cause for cheering with Lunts in town.-Morehouse.

h. Journal American-Pro: Yes would be my one word review. Sheer theatrical enchantment. Warmth, skill, true love and veneration for what the theatre stands for. Supporting cast worthy, overall perfection.-Garland.

i. World Telegram-Pro: It is happy and sentimental and all's right with the world in Lunts' family chronicle. Discursive play of wit and wisdom, richly set and dressed, acted with tone by first rate supporting cast.-Hawkins.

j. Brooklyn Eagle-Pro: If acting can make a show, may the return of the Lunts be hailed with enthusiasm. Flimsy tale but they rode it well. The Lunts are the play, they picked it up and made a night of it.-Currie.

k. Newark News-Pro: Ingratiating new play with the Lunts at their best. Play staged with rare skill by Lunt, acting delicately etched, fine cast.-Field.

l. Women's Wear Daily-Pro: Marvelous Lunts back to delight followers with incandescent artistry, matchless wit, sheer virtuosity of their playing. Technically a vehicle play, things bog down when Lunts off stage.-Dash.

Checking The Ads

The Theatre Guild's own birthday present for the Lunts was a large "quote" ad featuring the critics praise. Atkingson, Times, was quoted as saying "On the 25th anniversay of their first appearance as a team the Lunts are superb actors." But his "con" review really starts with "Let's face the facts, even on the silver anniversary of the Lunts."

Nation Literary Critic Subbing

Margaret Marshall, Literary Editor of The Nation, reviewed the recent plays. She announced that Joseph Wood Krutch, who has just finished his first 25 years of drama criticism, finds it necessary to forego the theatre for the time being.

I Know My Love

a. Morning Telegraph-Pro: Evening is shiny as a silk store, words flow with mirror smooth gracefulness and wit is greatly palatable. The play don't matter much, but their vehicles never need be critic proof at every seam. I think the Lunts don't need anything but a stage, a clutch of drapes and maybe a light or two to continue in their magic ways of the theatre.-Bolton.

b. Variety-Pro: Maybe not distinguished drama, but an enormously enjoyable show. First full scale box office smash of the season, likely film material. Lunts on stage most of time, so script faults can be overlooked.-Hobe.

c. Billboard-Pro: Play is no great shakes, but given Lunts' magic, it takes on the electric charge of theatre at its best. Acting field day for stars. Who said "the play's the thing" -- when you have the Lunts.-Francis.

d. Newsweek-Pro: Play is woefully weak and shallow, but Behrman has bolstered it with witty dialogue and unabashed sentiment, and the Lunts take it triumphantly from there. Competent cast, handsome sets. Show is something to be classed with the rain bow, spring's first robin, pink icing on gingerbread.

e. Time-Con: Not since the chocolate covered peppermints has anything so thin also been so gooey. But Lunts are as arch, expert and enjoyable here as elsewhere. Given half a chance they can put any scene across, but unhappily there are long stretches where there is neither any play on stage nor any Lunts.

f. Cue-Pro: Whatever the Lunts do, they take you in. They even make you enjoy the tame and none too tingly upper class air. Play is neither new or much of a play. Lunts only two who can fill a vacuum -- with a vacuum.-Gabriel.

g. Wall Street Journal-Pro: Lunts palpably superior to the play. It is no problem at all to enjoy them without the slightest feeling of guilt.-Cooke.

h. Journal of Commerce-Pro: Discerning playgoers may well wish the Lunts had a vehicle more worthy of their stimulating talents. Lunts bring great luster to the comedy. They are vastly superior to the piece.-Rhodes.

Browning Version

i. New Republic-Con: Browning Version not especially notable from literary standpoint. Evans, the reader, makes an attempt to act, but his part never comes alive. Rest of cast acted as if behaving like Englishmen were killing them. Harlequinade item wholly lamentable.-Clurman.

j. Saturday Review of Literature-Pro: The Browning Version makes the evening well worth seeing. As does Mr. Evans who in it proves himself to be as much at home in mufti as he ever was in tights.-Brown.

Touch And Go

k. Commonweal-Con: Far too few plums in Hallowe'en pie and far too much plain dough. Some good performances, but nothing hilarious.-Phelan.

Capsule Critiques by N.Y. Sun Hi Phillips

Montserrat . . . . . .Butch and Go
Lost in the Stars. . . . . .South Africa Non Pacific
Regina . . . . . .La Scala Little Fox Hunt
Ballets de Paris . . . . . .Twitch and Glow

Love Me Long

a. Times-Con: Five and ten replica of Private Lives. Since author, actors, directors probably would like to forget whole thing for the rest of their lives, this department is glad to cooperate. Oops, sorry!-Atkinson.

b. Herald Tribune-Con: No more than contrived comedy with too little wit and characterization to make it entertaining.-Barnes.

c. News-Con: Nice actors and comfortable looking chair on stage. This morning's crossword puzzle is harder and funnier than the plot of comedy.-Chapman.

d. Mirror-Con: A dud, couldn't love it, doubt if it be with us long. Incredible contrived farce. Pemberton should revive Harvey instead.-Coleman.

e. Compass-Con: A trifle, if you don't see this it won't hurt.-Pollock.

f. Post-Con: Five moments of justifiable laughter. In general it is dull, familiar, lugubrious comedy. It is no theatrical joy.-Watts.

g. Sun-Con: Little piece of nothing, it's pretty terrible. Writing self-conscious, situations trite, characters silly.-Morehouse.

h. Journal American-Con: No one let play down but author. Excellent cast, sets, costumes, but don't make excellent comedy. Anne Jackson should be picked as one of the most promising players of the season.-Garland.

i. World Telegram-Con: Private Lives without the jokes. Nothing objectionable, but radio used up audience for fragile meandering domestic plots.-Hawkins.

j. Brooklyn Eagle-Con: Only one word for play, "feeble".-Currie.

k. Newark News-Con: Imitative, contrived comedy, singularly trite and obviously minor venture. Lines too great handicap to able Shirley Booth.-Field.

l. Women's Wear Daily-Con: Despite fact has some amusing lines, it just does not jell, total effect is far from a happy one.-Dash.

m. Morning Telegraph-So-So: Maybe on paper it looked wonderful, funny, brisk. Does have some extremely funny dialogue, but is not in any honest sense a play at all. Actually a joke carried to its extremist ends. Booth carries whole play around by herself, amiable, charming cast.-Bolton.

n. Variety-Con: Few amusing moments, some sprightly gags, but otherwise it's a dry, thin farce, with little action, lack of lightness and wit. Even Booth can't help it enough. Broadway will love it little.-Bron.

Checking the Ads

"Emlyn Williams dominates the stage as the iniquitous Izquiredo. He achieved amazing emotional impact with admirable restraint" -- Coleman, Mirror. This is the quote appearing in the Times ad for Montserrat. Coleman actually panned the play, calling it uneven, insufficiently motivated, filled with valleys of stereotyped verbosity.

Montserrat

a. George Jean Nathan-Con: Play suffers from an internal monotony, impresses as a ponderous specimen of Sartre sort of think minus Sartre's knack of dressing up platitudes like Indians on warpath. Like patchwork of elements in other plays. Acting follows usual melodramatic directorial patterns.

b. Christian Science Monitor-Con: Heavy, stilted affair with only occasional moments of excitement. Hellman's reason for slowing the motion of play mystifies. Actors speak as if they were translating at sight.-Beaufort.

c. Nation-Con: Theme is shopworn in theatre, becomes suspicious rather than inspiring. Play is contrived as well as dated. Adaptation shows hand of skillful worker. Williams worth seeing in almost any circumstance.-Marshall.

d. Daily Worker-Pro: Like all Hellman plays, it is definitely worth seeing, has individual bits which are quite moving, some fine lines on freedom, and some adult and intelligent discussions. Yet it is only minor league Hellman which avoids Sartre arguments. Several parts badly miscast.-Rubin.

Regina

e. Wall Street Journal-Pro: Elaborate, interesting adaptation, cast sings songs well. An interesting evening, but wonder why it was made into musical.-Cooke.

f. Journal of Commerce-Con: Your own enjoyment depends on whether you can take another dose of the Hubbards with or without arias. Music and dancing only serves to retard action.-Rhodes.

g. Morning Telegraph-Pro: Not the best American opera, Hellman story loses much of its brutality in singing form. Producer merits praise in every department except judgement. Pickens sings spiritedly and magnificently, Lewis ran away with the proceedings. Score is musicianly, no hit songs.-Bolton.

h. Variety-Pro: Artistically, theatrically and musically it's a highly intriguing and meritorious work. Lavishly produced, brilliantly staged, sung and acted to the hilt by a fine cast. Has too many styles of music, and music doesn't always match production. But it is unusual and above average evening.-Bron.

i. Billboard-Con: Production-wise, it puts up a fine front, but this reporter will still take his Little Foxes without sauce a la Blitzstein. Boasts splendid voices, excellent direction, but script didn't gain anything.-Francis.

j. Christian Science Monitor-Pro: Provides a fascinating theatre experience, evening filled with delights and riches. Pickens is admirable, if not spectacular, rest of cast fine, full fledged opera.-Beaufort.

Regina

a. Newsweek-Pro: Considered as work for musical stage, it is stimulating on every count. Musical innovation less successful than daring. Lewis, Pickens fine. Producer shows fine taste in production values.

b. Time-Pro: An exhilarating and enjoyable show, taken on its own terms. Whole production done in style. Teems with brisk musical stage directions, brilliant little jingles, high spirited hocus-pocus. True that music is more clever than distinguished and drama is clearly a littler foxes.

c. Nation-Con: Little foxes seem to be more funny than fierce, effect comes close to burlesque. Large cast well chosen and voices are good. Seemed to me a rather weird amalgam of music.-Marshall.

d. New Yorker-Pro: Remarkably able job by Blitzstein, play remains comprehensible musical background interesting, usually suitable, often witty. Changes in script were probably necessary, but play not as shocking. Acting uneven.-Gibbs.

e. Cue-So-So: For one act it seemed to give a lavish, often lifting new dimension to the Hellman drama. But by the middle of the second, had to admit that it was doing more howl than good. The experiment has all the intensity it can take.-Gsbriel.

Checking the Ads

"Exceedingly disappointing" is what Barnes, Herald Tribune, thought of Regina, while Thomson, Herald Tribune, didn't think much more of the music. But the "quote" ad for Regina billed Barnes as saying "sung and acted superbly by Brenda Lewis, a performance to remember...Priscilla Gilette sings and acts with grace and conviction.

Lost In The Stars

f. Christian Science Monitor-Con: Can't get Paton's extraordinary novel out of my head, shell of narrative and purpose remains. But its deeper meaning, perceptive understanding of racial conflict, its rare breadth has been lost. Duncan sings, acts with honesty, does what he can within limits of script.-Beaufort.

g. Daily Worker-Con: More and more theatre people (except the commercial press drama critics) are getting wise to Anderson. Realize he is nothing more than a purveyor of slickly done, shallow theatricalities of the soaring philosophy found in the current Saturday Evening Post. Show confirms this and displays his exceptional ability to cheapen and degrade talent and material he works with. Terrific Negro talent and Weill's brilliant, militant score wasted because of Anderson's attempt to put over his Uncle Tom propaganda.-Rubin.

h. Nation-Con: Misguided zeal, money and talent. Anderson distorted Paton's tale, full of and fustian, both musical and verbal that even as a spectacle left me unimpressed.-Marshall.

i. New Yorker-Con: Found it dissapointing for variety of disconnected reasons. Discarded lot of story that gave it unique charm, tragedy never rises above level of melodramatic device, Duncan is monotonous actor, costumes and backdrop seem false. An interesting musical evening, but a pretty dull play.-Gibbs.

Walter White Praises Anderson-Weill Musical

Looking at Lost In The Stars from the racial viewport, Walter White in his Herald Tribune syndicated column cited the musical version of the Paton novel as a decidedly advanced step forward in picturing the maturation of the American theatre. "You will find no off-color humor or burlesque wiggling of torsos to titillate the senses of out-of-town buyers. Instead you will find human dignity which can conquer tragedy, incomparable music and acting of such excellence that your evening will be one you will never forget," he said.

Checking the Ads

"'All Star Triumph'...Barnes, Herald Tribune" is the headline for the large Lost In The Stars' quote ad. This phrase is not part of Barnes review of the play, but merely the headline used above his first paragraph by the drama desk copywriter. Anderson, who has been conducting a running feud with the critics for many years, okayed the quote ad in deference to the wishes of Weill and Mamoulian.

"Make or Break" Crix in Acid Test on Legit Preems -- says Variety

The power of the daily paper drama critics in making or breaking a show will be proved within the next few weeks, Variety reports. This is because of the wide difference of opinion expressed on "I Know My Love", "Regina" and "Lost In The Stars". Atkinson, Barnes, Chapman are supposed to have more boxoffice influence than all the other critics combined, Variety said. As these three were against "Regina", it will be a test of their power if the musical version of "The Little Foxes" can make a go of it without their backing. Atkinson also panned "I Know My Love".

Critics Attend Abbe Practical Workshop Play on Reich

George Bellak's "The Edge of the Sword", which opened the season at the Abbe Practical Workshop, 310 Riverside Drive, was reviewed by the Post and Times. Rice, Post, praised the theme and temper of the play on the problems of postwar Germany; but he thought the script could use a heavy going over with a blue pencil. Shanley, Times, thought the play was engrossing and thought-compelling. Both praised the cast headed by Katherine Sergava and Kurt Richards.

Key To N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance

Reviewers are rated as to how they like the show, not if they think it will be a hit. "Pro" means the reviewer recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. "Con" means he doesn't recommend it as such. "So-So" means the reviewer didn't state his preference directly.

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass(Star,PM)
6. NY Post
7. NY Sun
8. NY Journal American
9. NY World Telegram
10. Brooklyn Eagle
11. Newark News
12. Women's Wear Daily
13. Daily Worker
14. Wall St. Journal
15. Journal of Commerce
16. George J. Nathan
17. Morning Telegraph
18. Variety
19. Billboard
20. Theatre Arts
21. Catholic World
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Ch. Sci. Monitor
25. Sat. Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

N.Y.C. Criticism At A Glance -- see page 869 for key

A Streetcar Named Desire-Barrymore, 12/3/47. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-28-29-30. Con: 13-21-24. So-So: 16-27.

As The Girls Go-Broadway, 11/14/48. Pro: 1-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-14-15-16-18-19-23-26-27-29-30. Con: 2-5-17-22. So-So: 3-9-20-21.

Born Yesterday-Miller, 2-4-46. All 30 critics voted "Pro".

Browning Version-Coronet, 10/12/49. Pro: 1-2-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-17-18-19-25-26-28. Con: 3-16-23-27-29-30. So-So: 24.

Death Of A Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: Nation. So-So: Time.

Detective Story-Hudson, 3/23/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-14-15-17-18-19-20-22-23-26-27-30.

Diamond Lil-Plymouth, 2/5/49. 30 reviews for Mae. 30 against her play.

Goodbye My Fancy-Bock, 11/17/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-10-11-12-15-17-18-19-20-22-26-30. Con: 9-13-14-21-28-29. So-So: 16-23-25-27.

I Know My Love-Shubert, 11/1/49. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 1-5-27-30.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: New Republic. No review in Nation.

Lend An Ear-Mansfield, 12/16/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-15-16-17-18-19-20-21-22-23-24-26-27-30. Con: 5-13-29. So-So: 14-28.

Lost In The Stars-Music Box, 10/30/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-10-11-12-14-15-17-18-19-23-26. Con: 8-9-13-24-28-30. So-So: 4-27.

Miss Liberty-Imperial, 7/15/49. Pro: 4-7-8-12-17-19. Con: 1-2-18-20-22-23-27-29. So-So: 3-6-9-21-26.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-14-15-18-19-20-22-23-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Montserrat-Fulton, 10/29/49. Pro: 3-5-6-8-9-11-12-13-27. Con: 1-4-7-10-14-16-18-19-23-24-26-28-30. So-So: 2-15-17.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-9-12-15-17-18-19-20-24-25-26-30. So-So: 24-27.

Regina-46th Street Theatre, 10/31/49. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-9-11-12-14-17-18-24-26-27-30. Con: 2-3-10-15-19-28. So-So: 1-23.

The Madwoman of Chaillot-Royale, 12/28/48. Pro: 1-2-3-5-11-12-13-14-18-20-21-22 23-24-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 4-6-7-8-15-16-19-28. So-So: 9-10.

Touch And Go-Broadhurst, 10/13/49. Pro: 1-3-6-9-11-12-13-15-16-17-23-24-26-27-28-30. Con: 2-4-5-7-14-18-19-22. So-So: 8-10.

Where's Charley-St. James, 10/11/49. Pro: 1-2-3-5-8-9-11-14-15-17-18-20-21-23-29-30. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27.

Yes, M'Lord-Booth, 10/4/49. Pro: 2-3-5-6-7-9-11-14-15-17-19-22-26-30. Con: 1-4 8-13-23-27. So-So: 10-12-16.